

COME AND SEE

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John 1:29-42

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Leigh and I are convinced that our oldest daughter Sydney should be an attorney when she grows up, because it would be a shame for her amazing argumentative skills to go to waste. Sydney is so intelligent that she has the ability to debate almost anything, and usually win.

“Sydney, five more minutes of TV, and then it’s bedtime.”

“Aw, Dad, how about 10 more?”

“Sydney, I said five.”

“How about 15?”

“Sydney, I said five.”

“How about 20?”

“OK, 10 and that’s it.”

That girl would give Jack McCoy of “Law and Order” a run for his money.

I’ve never had any interest in being an attorney, but I’ve watched “A Few Good Men” enough times to know this: for any lawyer to have a credible case against someone, you have to have a witness. Without an witness, it’s all hearsay and speculation and he said-she said. Any good argument is strengthened by a witness.

In the Old Testament, before there was DNA testing and forensic pathologists and fingerprinting, cases were decided purely on the testimony of witnesses. That’s why one of the 10 Commandments is “Don’t bear false witness.” The authenticity of a witness was crucial to the maintaining of justice and order.

Our reading today provides us with an important witness: John the Baptist. During his ministry, John testifies: “Look! The Lamb of God!”, and goes on to give a powerful witness for how he knows Jesus is the Son of God.

It’s interesting to note the different names John uses for God. In this short passage, Jesus is called the Lamb of God, the Eternal One, Son of God, Rabbi, and Messiah. And those are only a fraction of the names the Bible gives for Jesus. He is also called, among other things, Emmanuel, Light of the World, Savior, and Son of Man. Why all these names? Why isn’t the name Jesus Christ sufficient?

When I was in college, working in a video store and kind of meandering my way through my bachelor’s degree, I didn’t have much of a clue about where I was going and what I was going to do. I was also a bit skeptical spiritually. I believed Jesus existed, but I didn’t really believe in Jesus as my savior. My life was good, I was a college student. Other than mid-terms and people who didn’t rewind their videos, what did I need saving from?

But then I heard a sermon one Sunday on Jesus as the Good Shepherd, one who guides us and leads us down life’s path. And it was like this epiphany for me. Suddenly the role of Jesus in my life made perfect sense. I needed someone to guide me, to give me direction; I needed a shepherd. It was only after getting to know Jesus as my Shepherd that I realized how much I needed Jesus as my Savior.

Our circumstances in life can shape who Jesus is for us. The person whose life is filled with conflict knows him as Prince of Peace. The oppressed know him as the true

Master. The ill and afflicted know him as the Great Physician. Those seeking knowledge know him as Rabbi. And the lonely know him as Friend. Separately, each of these names gives us a glimpse into a different aspect of Jesus' identity. Together, they form a constellation of images that witness to Jesus Christ.

The names used for Jesus obviously meant something to John's followers, because they immediately begin walking after Jesus when he passes. Sensing this, Jesus turns around and speaks his first words in the gospel, "What do you want?" Other translations say, "What are you looking for?"

Jesus has a way of cutting to the chase, doesn't he? No idle chit-chat or small talk about the weather. Instead, he turns to meet them and says, "What are you looking for?" It's a good question for them and for us. We come here Sunday after Sunday, participating in worship and fellowship, doing our part in the church. But what's our goal? What are we hoping happens to us as a result of this? The two disciples said they wanted to see where Jesus was staying. They want more than just a passing word. They wanted to abide with him, to rest with him, to simply be in his company. Are we hoping to catch a once-a-week glimpse of Jesus, or do we want something more? What are we looking for?

And so Jesus offers the disciples a simple invitation, the same invitation that's been offered to us: Come and see. Come and see who I am and what I'm all about. Come and learn about me. But more importantly, come and learn about yourself.

That's what Peter does. He actually starts off this story as Simon, brother of Andrew. Andrew meets Jesus and calls him Rabbi, but after a few hours with him, Andrew tells Simon not about Jesus the Rabbi but Jesus the Messiah, the anointed one of God.

Just as Andrew gives Jesus a name change, so Jesus does the same with Simon. Jesus says, "You are Simon, but you will be called Cephas," which translates in Greek as "Peter," or "the rock" like the word "petrified."

This is strange, because Jesus has just met Peter for the first time. We don't get any indication that Peter is a body-builder or has six-pack abs, so I don't think this new name describes his physicality. What Jesus is doing is calling Peter, not who he is, but who he has the potential to be. He's casting a vision for Peter, as Andy Stanley says. Jesus isn't just looking at Peter; he's looking into him. From this day forward, Peter will carry forward a constant reminder of what Jesus saw in him.

I remember at a family gathering when I was young my mom was asking me questions from a baseball trivia book. After I answered a few questions in a row, my uncle Herman said, "That boy should be on a game show!" I'm presuming he didn't mean "The Gong Show." Now, I never made it onto a game show, but his comment has stuck with me to this day. He saw something in me, named it to me, and changed the way I saw myself.

The beauty of this story is that Jesus has a new name for each of us, as well. Some of us have heard those names, and are already attempting to live them out – teacher, singer, minister, elder. Others of us may still be discovering those names. These aren't simply jobs or duties; these are the identities God has endowed us with, just as he gave Peter the potential to be the rock on which he would build the church.

Was Peter always a rock? Far from it. Many times he was as soft as Jell-O, wavering back and forth in his faith. But eventually he became one of the leaders in the

early church movement. Do you think he ever forgot the moment when Jesus called him Cephas? Do you think I've ever forgotten the first moment someone called me a minister? God has a name for you. Have you heard it? Are you living it out?

We have been given an invitation to come and see what God has planned for us, and like the disciples, we're called to offer the same invitation to others. There are people in our lives who are trying to answer the question "What do you want?" but who haven't been invited to seek the answer. They desire so badly to be welcomed into the light, to be accepted, to be loved. But no one has said to them, "Come and see."

I'm not talking about the strangers we've never met. Witnessing about God in our lives doesn't require us to go stand on a street corner reading the Gospel or go door-to-door handing out literature. Some churches think it's important to get right in someone's face about the issue, to confront them with Jesus in Baskin Robbins when they're trying to decide between Peanut Butter Cup and Fudge Ripple.

Here's what I think, for what it's worth. Religion is a personal issue, but not a private one, especially not for those who believe in the Good News. As for not being advanced enough, who is? We're not called to change lives with a simple conversation. Our job is merely to witness and invite; God's responsible for the renaming.

There are people out there that we know and love who want someone to ask them, "What do you want? What are you looking for?" There are people out there who need to know that Jesus is their Prince of Peace, their Good Shepherd, their Bread of Life, their Friend and Lord and Savior. They need to know this. Their lives depend on it.

You and I both know people like that. So maybe the name we've been given by God today is the name of "sharer of the Good News." Here, then, is how to live out that name: "We have worship at 8 a.m. and 10 a.m. on Sunday. We have Sunday School for the kids and active youth groups. We have men's and women's groups, and we work once a month at a local soup kitchen. Most of all, we love being together and we love serving God. We don't have all the answers, but we sure enjoy asking the questions together. We're a family. Won't you come and see?"